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POLICY ISSUES: COORDINATION AND COOPERATION WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS

COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME AND THE
UNITED NATIONS CENTRE FOR HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (UNCHS) (Habitat)

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report on cooperation between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) (Habitat) has been prepared jointly by the secretariats of the two organizations in accordance with General Assembly resolution 40/199 of 17 December 1985, resolution 8/14 of the Commission on Human Settlements (8 May 1985) and decision 13/12 of the Governing Council of UNEP (23 May 1985). It contains information on the joint activities of UNEP and UNCHS (Habitat) under the four subject areas established by the joint Bureau meeting at the seventh session of the Commission on Human Settlements, as well as on other cooperative efforts, particularly during the run-up to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), which was held in Istanbul from 3 to 14 June 1996.

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Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

- (a) Take note, with satisfaction, of the increased cooperation between the organizations;
- (b) Encourage the Executive Director to continue her efforts to intensify cooperation between the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements in relation to the Sustainable Cities Programme, within available resources.

1. COOPERATION UNDER THE FOUR SUBJECT AREAS

Subject area 1: Assessment of environmental conditions in human settlements

1. The report World Resources: a Guide to the Global Environment of 1996-1997 devotes special attention to the assessment of environmental conditions in the urban environment as a contribution to the Habitat II conference. UNCHS (Habitat) and UNEP made substantial technical inputs to this joint publication of the World Resources Institute, UNEP, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank.
2. The joint Sustainable Cities Programme has supported the development of "environmental profiles" in cities preparing to become participants in the Programme. Profiles involve a broad range of local stakeholders and provide information not only on the state of the physical environment, but also on its implications for social and economic development and on existing environmental management arrangements. Most recently, such environmental assessments have been concluded in Shenyang and Wuhan (China), Lusaka (Zambia), Maputo and Nampula (Mozambique) and Madras (India). UNCHS (Habitat) and UNEP have also cooperated in international meetings in Dakar (Senegal, June 1995), Madras (India, February 1996), and Istanbul (Turkey, June 1996) to document experiences in environmental management from some 50 cities.

Subject area 2: Environmental aspects of policies, planning and management of human settlements - both rural and urban

UNEP/UNCHS (Habitat) Task Force on the Continuum from Relief to Development

4. Under the aegis of the Joint UNEP/UNCHS (Habitat) Task Force on the Continuum from Relief to Development, the two organizations initiated an activity in response to the problems facing the African Great Lakes Region of Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zaire. A report on this initiative, a Strategic Action Plan for the Great Lakes Region, was completed and presented at a Donor's Roundtable on Rwanda, held on 23 January 1996 in Geneva, Switzerland. The goal of the Strategic Action Plan is to bring a region-wide focus to the ongoing and future efforts of countries and external agencies, including UNEP and UNCHS (Habitat), towards attaining political, social and environmental stability and sustainable economic development in the entire Great Lakes region.

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Pilot project

5. A feasibility study on the establishment of a pilot project for the production of densified carbonaceous briquettes (smokeless fuel) was also completed and work is under way on expanding existing facilities for the production of this alternative household energy source, in view of the widespread environmental damage associated with the use of firewood or charcoal and the serious health impact of inhalation of wood smoke.

The new joint Sustainable Cities Programme

6. UNEP and UNCHS (Habitat) cooperation in environmental aspects of policies, planning and management of human settlements entered a new era in January 1996 when the two agencies formally established a full partnership in the Sustainable Cities Programme (SCP) as recommended by the Governing Council decision 18/15 (April 1995) and resolution 15/8 of the Commission on Human Settlements (May 1995).

7. Initially meant to package and apply the specialized know-how available from UNEP and UNCHS (Habitat), the SCP has become the primary tool for supporting Agenda 21 at the city level. The SCP, working with more than 20 agency partners world-wide, is an important new tool for supporting implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The SCP continued to gain momentum during 1995 and 1996 and is operating in an increasing number of countries. Support to these city demonstrations has improved dramatically since early 1996, when UNCHS (Habitat) and UNEP agreed to share equally the cost of an expanded SCP core team. Activities undertaken during 1996 include a first meeting of all SCP and associated cities, held in Istanbul in June 1996, and a package of activities for enhanced communication and awareness-building, as well as accelerated preparation of environmental planning and management tools.

8. Increased cooperation through the SCP at the city level has enabled the two organizations to work together and realize the unique complementarities of their scientific, technical and financial resources. Such cooperation was provided in the areas of environmentally sustainable technologies, water and coastal management, environmental health, geographic information systems (GIS), and the management of industrial risk. In the latter area, training workshops and consultative services have been provided by the Industry and Environment Programme Activity Centre (IE/PAC) through its Awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies at Local Level (APELL) programme.

9. Another important joint output of the SCP during the biennium was a meeting on "Implementing the urban environment agenda", held on 1 June 1996, during the Habitat II Conference. Over 250 representatives of more than 75 cities and 20 international support programmes working in the urban environment convened to define a common support agenda for urban environmental planning and management and related international support. There was a clear consensus that the area of inter-programme cooperation offered much under-utilized potential and that city interest and support for that initiative were considerable. The participants committed themselves to a continuation of the dialogue among cities and international support programmes and adopted the Istanbul Manifesto on Implementing the Urban

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Environment Agenda. Such an urban environment forum will provide a firm basis for strengthening and expanding future activities in support of their joint commitment to the urban environment agenda.

Managing water resources for large cities and towns

10. A conference entitled "Managing water resources for large cities and towns", organized by UNCHS (Habitat) with the support of UNEP and other organizations, was held in Beijing in March 1996. The main objectives of the conference were to exchange information, ideas and experience on successful practices in freshwater and wastewater management in large cities and other urban settlements, to synthesize viewpoints and commitments for the action continuum from Agenda 21 to the Habitat Agenda to be adopted in Istanbul, and to prepare a substantive framework for a roundtable on water resources management in cities and towns (the Habitat II Dialogue for the 21st Century on Water). The conference concluded with the "Beijing Declaration", a statement on issues and priorities in urban water resources management and a set of recommendations for ensuring sustainability, documented case studies on urban water resources management, and heightened awareness among stakeholders on sustainable methods of urban water resources management.

The role of local authorities in the urban environment

11. A major initiative of UNCHS (Habitat), with financial support from UNEP, was the publication Making Cities Work which was launched at the Habitat II Conference. Produced in collaboration with the International Council for Local Environmental Institutions (ICLEI) and the United Towns Development Agency, acting on behalf of the "G4+" grouping of international associations of local authorities, the book maps out, from their perspective, the role and functions of local authorities in sustainable urban development. Designed to provide a policy blueprint for future local authority-United Nations partnership in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the book also contains a number of illustrative best practices in municipal management to underscore the catalytic and innovative role of local authorities in human settlements development.

Subject area 3: Environmentally sound and appropriate human settlements technology

International Environmental Technology Centre (IETC)

12. The International Environmental Technology Centre (IETC) gave technical assistance to the SCP by providing advisory services on environmental planning and management and supporting capacity-building activities, particularly in the area of transfer of environmentally sound technologies, environmental risk assessment, environmental technology assessment and the preparation of environmental profiles as a basis for urban environmental planning and management. IETC is currently collaborating in four Sustainable Cities projects; Shenyang and Wuhan in China, Katowice in Poland and Concepcion in Chile. IETC implemented a regional workshop for Eastern Europe on environmental risk assessment in April 1996.

13. IETC also made a contribution to the Habitat II Conference by sponsoring and organizing, together with the Global Environment Centre (GEC) Foundation of Japan, a symposium and exhibition on environmentally sound technologies (ESTs) in Istanbul on 5 June 1996. The symposium highlighted examples of "hard" ESTs on solid waste management and wastewater treatment from Germany, Japan, Senegal and the United States, as well as examples of "soft" ESTs on capacity-building, planning and management. It was attended by local and national executives, representatives from industry, NGOs and academics from developing countries.

Subject area 4: Research, training and the dissemination of information on environmentally sound human settlements planning and management

14. Data and technical support were given to UNCHS (Habitat) during the Habitat II process. Digital maps and posters created in the GRID laboratory were exhibited during the Conference. The joint SCP initiated work on several programme-level support activities for the SCP city network. All these activities respond to needs identified at the city level and make use of lessons from operational experience. The resulting products will be put to immediate use in the cities and include the following: tools for remote-sensing and GIS technology; tools for air quality management; tools for environmental risk assessment; tools for the management of environmental health risks; tools for addressing gender issues in sustainable urban development; tools for conducting city consultations; a CD-ROM and world-wide-web site; non-recurrent technical publications; video documentaries; Sustainable City News, a quarterly newsletter; and an information service to provide routine responses to queries.

II. COOPERATION IN SYSTEM-WIDE EFFORTS

The Habitat II Conference

15. UNEP assisted UNCHS (Habitat) in preparing for Habitat II by loaning a staff member and by arranging and producing special publications, posters, workshops and meetings in cooperation with other organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations. Special mention should be made of the fact that the World Environment Day celebrations in 1996 were held in Istanbul in support of Habitat II.

16. Another notable example of UNEP and UNCHS (Habitat) cooperation has been to establish, based on the recommendation of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) at its third session in March 1994, and later endorsed by the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), a mechanism for cross-sectoral collaborative programming in sustainable urban development. This urban forum is expected to provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to exchange views and build partnerships to address the multi-sectoral challenges of urbanization. The forum could eventually become a useful mechanism for joint programming not only among the United Nations agencies, but also with other important partners such as NGOs and the private sector.

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17. A proposal on the organizational aspects and functions of the forum is currently under discussion. Initially, the forum is expected to focus on the exchange of information on "best practices" in different areas of urban management and on monitoring country-level collaboration among external support agencies.

18. UNCHS (Habitat) and UNEP work closely together in reporting on the sustainable development of water resources for urban use to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Water Resources. In its capacity as the Task Manager on water resources for the IACSD, the Subcommittee on Water Resources prepares reports for the CSD which incorporate inputs from all relevant United Nations system organizations and specialized agencies.

III. FUTURE PROSPECTS

19. With the adoption of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), a new framework for future cooperation between UNEP and UNCHS (Habitat) has been provided. With regard to the major goal of the Habitat Agenda in working towards sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world, the joint Sustainable Cities Programme has a clear potential as an important implementing mechanism. The catalytic efforts of the SCP in bringing together other urban programmes of international organizations and cities in implementing the urban environment agenda promise to be a major breakthrough more effectively integrating and coordinating the activities of the United Nations system with those of local communities and local authorities.
